R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 011 117 AL 000 200

CHINESE LANGUAGE AND AREA STUDIES IN A UNIVERSITY.

BY- HUCKER, CHARLES O.

PUB DATE FEB 67

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.09 HC-$0.28 7P.

DESCRIPTORS- *LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION, *GRADUATE STUDY, *CHINESE, COLLEGE PREPARATION, ACCELERATED COURSES, CURRICULUM GUIDES

THE AUTHOR STATES THAT ONE OF THE MOST PRESSING PROBLEMS IN THE TEACHING OF CHINESE ON THE GRADUATE LEVEL IS DEFINING THE SCOPE OF THE AREA STUDIES AND DEVELOPING A CORE LANGUAGE PROGRAM THAT WILL BOTH ACCOMODATE THE STUDENT'S ACADEMIC PURPOSE AND USE HIS LANGUAGE PREPARATION. GRADUATE CENTERS SHOULD ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO STUDY CHINESE FOR COMPREHENSION IN POLITICAL SCIENCE, CHINESE LITERATURE, OR LINGUISTICS, IN ADDITION TO OBTAINING A NATIVE COMMAND OF THE LANGUAGE. EARLY LANGUAGE TRAINING THAT IS EXTREMELY INTENSIVE PRESENTS A CURRICULUM PROBLEM FOR THE GRADUATE SCHOOLS TRYING TO ESTABLISH AN INTEGRATED "AREA STUDIES" PROGRAM. THE AUTHOR FEELS THAT KNOWLEDGE OF A FOREIGN LANGUAGE MUST ULTIMATELY BE A TOOL FOR SOME LARGER ACADEMIC PURPOSE. THIS ARTICLE IS PUBLISHED IN THE "JOURNAL OF THE CHINESE LANGUAGE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION." VOLUME 2, NUMBER 1, FEBRUARY 1967. (FB)

ED011117

JOURNAL

of the

Chinese Language Teachers Association

Vol. II No. 1 Feb. 1967

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

AL 000 200

CHINESE LANGUAGE AND AREA STUDIES IN A UNIVERSITY*

Charles O. Hucker
University of Michigan

One of the problems faced by those of us who are engaged in Chinese language teaching at the graduate level arises from the very success with which interest in Chinese studies has spread in recent years. I am not thinking so much of an increase in the number of students; this has not yet, I think, become an insuperable difficulty for the major graduate centers, although it might reach such proportions if interest at the high school and undergraduate levels continues to grow. What I have in mind is that we are now regularly faced with a tremendous diversity of disciplinary interests among our students, since Chinese studies have escaped from their old Sinological captivity and wandered into a host of disciplines.

I represent an institution that was one of the pioneers in area studies developments and still has, I think, as broad a range of disciplinary interests represented in its Chinese studies faculty as any in the country. This means that in our language program at Michigan we have to think of the needs of greatly varied students -- not merely historians and literary specialists, but students specializing in the history of art, in economics, in political science, in philosophy, in anthropology, in linguistics, even in music and law. One of the most impressive developments in our field in recent years, as a matter of fact, is the realization -- which is now standard -- that a student cannot hope to do serious graduate work in any field relating to China without having competence in the language. That is very encouraging, and it is certainly appropriate. But developing a language program that will serve such varied needs is a very real problem. If the student's professional work demands that he be able to read Jen-min Jih-pao and to interview refugees in Hong Kong, do we have any business requiring that he also be able to read Mencius? Or, if the student's professional work demands that he read Mencius and Chu Hsi, do we have any business requiring that he also be able to interview refugees and browse in Jen-min Jih-pao?

The student of this generation is already too quick to denounce us for being unnecessarily paternalistic no matter what we tell him we require for his own good; he no longer has to tolerate being told he must postpone what he wants to do until he completes an unreasonable regimen of things that have no relevance to what he wants to do. We therefore are forced to create a double standard -- one for students in our own language and literature degree programs, and another for so-called "area" students. But it is obviously impractical, even if we could agree it is desirable, to create a whole spectrum of specialized programs -- Chinese for political scientists, Chinese for art historians, Chinese for ethnomusicologists, Chinese for economists, and so forth. What we obviously have to do is develop a core language program that we can confidently believe provides a good language

---

*Paper presented as part of a panel on the role of Chinese language teaching in relation to other disciplines at the CLTA annual meeting in New York, 30, December 1966.

foundation for everyone, make it of such length in academic semesters or quarters that it is feasible for everyone, and manage it with the discreet realization that students will function differently in it according to their different natures as individuals and their different academic goals. Beyond this point, it must be assumed that students pursuing very specialized paths will be able to develop their language needs further in the field or under special tutorial guidance. Whether such tutorial guidance ought to be provided by the language department or by the "area" department of the student's specialization is a matter of considerable jurisdictional dispute and is resolved in different ways in different institutions. I personally believe that it is unreasonable to expect a language department to provide such advanced tutorial guidance in fields such as, say, economics or ethnomusicology.

In any event, what kinds of work should ideally constitute the core language program for all students, unfortunately, remains a problem; and in this regard the graduate centers have a very great interest in what is done with students at lower levels. You need not be told by me that we still have no general agreement on a common standard for first-year work in Chinese, much less for subsequent work. The Yale materials are probably still the most widely used texts, but the De Francis texts have won a number of adherents, and Chao Yuen Ren naturally has his unshakeable devotées. But even in programs using the same materials there is much disagreement about the weight that should be given to oral-aural work as against reading, and there are still programs that allow or even require students to begin Chinese with wen-yen. The products of all these programs converge, at different levels of progress, in the graduate centers, which must somehow straighten things out in terms of their own language programs, often to the great discomfort and unhappiness of the students. Nice as it undeniably is for students to get an early start in their Chinese language work, it does complicate the affairs of the graduate centers.

The problem is further complicated by increasing opportunities for intensification of language progress. Like many other institutions, we at Michigan have our own language program double-tracked, so that students who wish to proceed at a relatively normal college-style pace can do so while students who are more impatient to get ahead can take what we call "intensive" courses, which are really just double-timed, accelerated courses. I understand that the University of Washington in Seattle has recently been experimenting with genuine "intensive" beginning work in Japanese, which immerses the student full-time in Japanese language work through an academic year; and it may be that other schools are attempting to do the same thing in Chinese. Moreover, there has been a great growth of interest in intensive summer institutes and in such overseas programs as the Inter-University Program for Chinese Language Studies in Taipei, which enable impatient students -- often with substantial fellowship or scholarship encouragement -- to take giant steps toward achievement of the goals I have in mind for a core language program. Our own students naturally take advantage of these opportunities when they can, and students coming into our program as graduate students have often had prior experience of two or three different systems -- in academic years elsewhere, in summer institutes, or in the field. It has almost come to the point where there is virtually no one who moves through what might be called a normal first-year, second-year, and third-year sequence

of Chinese language courses.

I must confess that both early starting and accelerating of Chinese language work give me some qualms. I say this not because coordinating many different kinds of language backgrounds in the program of a graduate center gives me many administrative headaches. I have genuine doubts of what might be called a philosophical sort, which I am not at present prepared to explore in detail. Perhaps it may suffice for me to say that, however desirable it may be to give committed graduate students all possible opportunities to accelerate their progress in language learning, I am not al all convinced as yet that urging undergraduates and even high school students into Chinese language work of any sort -- much less enticing them with scholarships into accelerated summer and overseas programs -- is a wise utilization of educational resources that are still very limited, or a justifiable channeling of the student's own educational development. Naturally, such accelerated programs are popular among the students; but I very much fear we run the grave risk of distorting their views of what is important.

If I may presume to speak for a moment as a mere citizen, I suggest that it is of great importance to America that as many as possible of our students, and as early as possible, fall into the habit of thinking that things Chinese are part of the world in which they must live and, in addition, have opportunities to understand themselves as human beings more fully by being confronted with something they decidedly are not, for good or ill. Encouraging or allowing students at an early age to study Chinese language is certainly one way of accomplishing this goal. But it is a very arduous way and it consumes a great deal of energy and time before any satisfactory results can be attained. Please do not misunderstand me. I am not now speaking as one of those myriads of men on the street who ask what earthly practical use there is to studying Chinese. I am merely saying that, although learning about China is a fine and necessary thing, doing so by studying the language is the most expensive possible way of doing it. Incorporating China into world history courses or any of dozens of other general-education courses, or offering special courses on Chinese history or Chinese civilization, at either the high school or the freshman-sophomore level can certainly have the desired impact on far larger numbers of students and at far less cost.

Speaking on the other hand as the administrator of a graduate language program, I suggest that getting students into Chinese language work too young and too fast involves some other risks. I find that my depar tment is in danger of playing the role in the Chinese studies field that English depar tments have traditionally been accused, rightly or wrongly, of playing in colleges generally -- that is, of being a catch-all for students who do not know what they want to do. It is of course pleasing to encounter a student who wants to take up graduate studies in Chinese because he or she has become fascinated by the language. But all too often our interviews go about as follows: She says (usually it's a she): "I'd like to go into your graduate program in Chinese." I courteously respond, "That's very nice; what do you want to do?" She says, "Well, I've only had three years of Chinese, so I don't really have command of it. I want to go on until I really know Chinese." And I say, "And what do you have in mind doing with yourself then?" And she says, "Well, I suppose I'll teach." I ask, "Teach what?" And she replies, "Chinese, of course." Then I say, "Meantime, what do you aim at doing graduate research in?

The linguistic aspects of Chinese? Chinese literature?" Well, you know the result. The student has no conception that the business of a graduate school is producing scholars, and that scholars use Chinese as a tool for enlarging our understanding of the Chinese language in a linguistics sense, or Chinese literature, or history, or politics, or whatever. The student has become so absorbed in learning the language that this has become an end in itself. Unfortunately, however worthy a goal this might be in some abstract sense, just learning a language is not the business of our graduate schools.

Sometimes, with admitted exaggerations, I tell such students there is no future in their trying to become native speakers of Chinese. At least, there is no future in academia for them. Teaching Chinese in the way they have in mind can be done far more competently after relatively brief training, by hundreds or perhaps thousands of genuine native speakers who are available I would much, much rather be visited by an American graduate-school prospect who would say, for example, "I'm sorry that I've had no opportunity as yet to begin Chinese language work, but I am very much interested in poetry and understand there is a huge and important corpus of Chinese poetry, some of which I've encountered in translation; and I'd like to devote myself now to learning Chinese with a view toward studying the Chinese poetic tradition." Here is someone who has a future -- both in graduate school and beyond.

Although I have not had any experience with high school students except as an occasional lecturer, I have spent many years developing undergraduate programs in Chinese studies and teaching undergraduates both language and so-called area courses. You will therefore understand, I trust, that I say what I have just said with tongue in cheek, to some extent. I do hope that serious students will get started in their language work early, and I am in favor of their making the most rapid progress that makes sense. But I presume to urge those of you who are engaged in teaching Chinese language at the foundation levels to see to it that your students become more than mere enthusiasts for the language. Their enthusiasm is of course a valuable thing that has to be cultivated. But, in fairness to themselves, they must also cultivate outside academic interests so that, ultimately, language and discipline interests can fruitfully converge. Naturally, our success and effectiveness as language teachers depends upon the extent to which we can act as if learning the language were goal enough. But the student's success in academic life will in the end depend upon his realization that learning the language is merely a step toward using it for some scholarly purpose.